Annals of Oriental Research Volume XIX—Part II

TOWARDS MODERN INDIAN PHONOLOGY

BY

Dr. S. Shankar Raju Naidu,
M.A., Ph.D., F.R.A.S., (London.)
Head of the Department of Hindi,
University of Madras,
MADRAS.

TOWARDS MODERN INDIAN PHONOLOGY

By

Dr. S. Shankar Raju Naidu,
M.A., Ph.D., F.R.A.S., (London),
Head of the Department of Hindi,
University of Madras,
MADRAS.

TOWARDS MODERN INDIAN PHONOLOGY

Dr. S. SHANKAR RAJU NAIDU, M.A., Ph.D., F.R.A.S., (London),
Head of the Department of Hindi,
University of Madras, Madras.

•For some time now, Indian scholars have been attempting to evolve a common system of orthography for writing down all the languages of India, but little has been done towards the compilation of the essential phonological units to represent the basic sounds of the Indian Languages. It is towards this objective that the present paper endeavours to describe the scope and arrive at conclusions based on the phonological features of Modern Indian Languages.

2. It is worthwhile remembering that in any good and scientific system of orthography, each graphic symbol should represent one unique sound unit and should not be granted exemption to represent more than one. It may be certainly true that for a particular language, a phonemic analyses may give out all the necessary meaningful sound units and we may arrive at a generally acceptable phonological system. But this alone is not sufficient for a proper and appropriate form of utterance of the sounds of any language or languages, particularly when a language is to be read by one whose mother tongue is not that language.

It has been found with only a very few exceptions that when a person speaks a language other than his mother tongue and tries to follow the language through the sound system as accepted for the script of that language, he miscrably fails in arriving at

the correct form of utterance which is generally approved of for the language. The range of getting away from the correct form becomes still wider when one studies the language with the help of any script other than the one used for the language by its people, causes for which are endless and it is needless to enumerate them here in detail. I shall only say that the language thus studied and spoken will be a humourous combination of the features of his own mother tongue, the language studied and the sound system of the script as understood by him.

Hence when one ventures to speak about the script for any language other than his mother-toungue or may be even his own mother-tounge, he must necessarily have a clear grasp of the sound system of the language and its relationship with those of others. He must lay his hand over such problems only when he is perfectly sure of the phonological pattern of the language and is confident that the study of the language through the adopted script will not become a mockery.

3. It is still more difficult to arrive at a proper system of orthography for more than one langauge, specially when they belong to diffierent families. It will only be proving the ignorance of a person should he go to suggest that a script of a language should be, in toto, accepted for another language or other languages.

Writing of a language by a different script is as difficult as the translation of a matter from one language into another, if not more. By and large it may be stated that the meaning of the same word changes when it becomes a loan. Sanskrit word 'upanyasa' in Hindi means a 'noval' and a 'lecture' in South Indian languages. So also the phonetic quality as accepted for a particular symbol for a particular language considerably changes when it is adopted for a different language. However several symbols may retain their qualities.

4. With all these problems in view, when a common system of orthography is to be arrived at for all the Indian languages, a very careful study of the phonological systems of all the languages of India should first be taken up, and after a comparative evaluation of them all, a compact system of writing should be evolved to represent clearly all the essential regional phonological features. Here a compilation of the minimum meaningful sound units alone may not be sufficient, because it may in the long run destroy the very spirit of the language for which it is adopted. Now we have different writing systems for all the major languages of India with a singular exception of Hindi and Marathi which have adopted the Nagari characters with only a very little difference.

5. The two major families of languages in India, namely Indo-Aryan and Dravidian, have very many distinguishing features in all levels of linguistic analysis, the chief among them being the phonetic aspect. I am taking here Hindi as the representative of the Modern Indian Indo-Aryan langauges and Tamil as the representative of the Dravidian. If we can evolve a common system of writing for these two langauges, the problem will be greatly solved and the All India system of orthography will be clearly visible. But before arriving at the basic orthography, one should necessarily discuss and decide about the necessary sound units.

Hence it becomes imperative that a comparative study of the phonological systems of the two should be taken up at first.

6. *Phonology of Standard Hindi* :

I. *Vowels* (Total 13)

Short ... ... *a*, i, u, ɛ

Long ... ... *a*:, i:, u:, e:, ɛ:, o:, ɔ:

Diphthongs ... *ai*, *au*

Examples —

Vowel	*Word*		*Remarks*
a	अब	*a*b	Initial position
a:	आप	*a*:p	,,
i	इस	is	,,
i:	ईख	i:kh	,,
u	उस	us	,,
u:	ऊन	u:n	,,
e:	एक	e:k	,,
ɛ	बहना	bɛhn*a*:	Medial position
	as distinguished from		
	बहो	b*a*ho:)	
ɛ:	ऐसा	ɛ:s*a*:	Initial position
	or पैसा	pɛ:s*a*:	Medial position
*a*i	मैया	m*a*ij*a*:	,,
o:	ओस	o:s	Initial position
ɔ:	और	ɔ:r	,,
*a*u	कौवा	k*a*u*a*:	Medial position

Positions of cardinal Hindi Vowels —

i	u
e	o
ɛ	ɔ
	a

II. *Consonants* (Total 40)

Plosives ... ... k, c, ṭ, t, p (क च, ट, त, प)

All these have their aspirated, voiced and voiced aspirated counterparts bringing them altogether to a total of 20.

Nasals — ŋ, ṅ, ṇ, n, m (ङ, ञ, ण, न, म)

These correspond to the places of articulation of the five plosives mentioned above.

Lateral — — — l (ल)

Rolled — — — r (र)

Flapped— — — ṛ and also its aspirated counterpart ṛh (ड़, ढ़)

Fricative — — v, ś, ṣ, s, h (व, श, ष, स, ह)

Semi-vowel — — i (य)

Urdu elements —

Plosive Uvular — q (क़)

Fricative Labio-dental — f (फ़)

„ Dental — z (ज़)

„ Velar — x, ɣ (ख़, ग़)

Here the last five are loan elements and have been so absorbed in Hindi that they can in no way be dispensed with. All the rest are indigenous elements of the Standard Hindi language.

As all the above forty elements have clearcut places and manners of articulation with recognised orthographic symbols as against the vowels, separate examples are not necessary. Any good dictionary will offer the material needed.

7. *Phonology of Standard Tamil* :

I. *Vowels* (Total 13)

Short — — — *a*, i, u, e, o, ɯ

Long — — — *a*:, i:, u:, e:, o:

Diphthongs — — — *a*i, *a*u

Examples —

Vowel	*Word*		*Remarks*
a	அலை	al*a*i	Initial position
a:	ஆம்	*a*:m	,,
i	இலை	il*a*i	,,
i:	ஈ	i:	,,
u	உலை	ul*a*i	,,
u:	ஊர்	u:r	,,
e	எலி	eli	,,
e:	ஏர்	e:r	,,
*a*i	ஐவர்	*a*iv*a*r	,,
o	ஒரு	orɯ	,,
o:	ஓலை	o:l*a*i	,,
*a*u	ஔடதம்	*a*uḍ*a*t*a*m	,,
ɯ	அது	*a*dɯ (as distinguished from u of '*va*:ju' of Hindi in the final position.	Final position (unrounded u)

Positions of cardinal Tamil Vowels —

(ɯ)... ... ...Unrounded.

i u

e o

a

II. *Consonants* (Total 27)

Plosives — — k, c, ṭ, t, p (க, ச, ட, த, ப)

The voiced forms of these five — g, ɟ, ḍ, d, b — should also be added. These five have no separate orthographic symbols in Tamil and consequently the same five shown above are used, the voicing of which is followed on certain principles codified by the grammarians.

Nasals — — — ṅ, ñ, ṇ, n, m and alveolar ṉ
(ங, ஞ, ண, ந, ம, ன)

It is a very remarkable feature that it is only in Tamil that six orthographic symbols are found to clearly distinguish the six nasal elements, and no other writing system of any other language of the world has had them till now. These six symbols are referred to even in Tolkappiam which is supposed to be a work on Tamil Grammar of about 4th century B.C.

Lateral — — — — l, ḷ (ல, ள)

Rolled — — — — r (ர)

Fricative — — — — v, ṣ, s, h (வ, ஷ, ஸ, ஹ)

Frictionless continuant — ɹ (ழ)

This is again a symbol which is a unique feature of Tamil. (This exhists in Malayalam too.)

Semi vowel — — — j (ய)

Another conspecuous sound unit as transcribed by Daniel Jones, is t̠ (ற) which is alveolar with an element of trill and different from t and ṭ.

Examples — pattɯ (பத்து) meaning ten; pat̠t̠ɯ (பற்று) meaning attachment and paṭṭɯ (பட்டு) meaning silk. This unit has also its voiced counterpart d̠ when it occurs in places like Kan̠d̠ɯ (கன்று) meaning calf; on̠d̠ɯ meaning one. The Tamil symbol for both is the same.

As these twentyseven elements also have clearcut features, further examples are not given. Any good dictionary will solve the situation.

8. Similar phonological units in the two systems :—

(i) *Vowels* — (Total 10)

Short — — *a*, i, u

Long — — *a*:, i:, u:, e:, o:

Diphthongs – *ai*, *au*

(ii) *Consonants* — (Total 22)

Plosives — — k, g, c, ɟ, ṭ, ḍ, t, d, p, b

Nasals — — ŋ, ṅ, ṇ, n, m

Others — — j, r, l, v, ṣ, s, h

9. Dissimilar Phonological units in the two systems :—

(i) *Vowels* — (Total 6)

Short — — ɛ (Hindi)

e, o, ɯ (Tamil)

Long — — ɛ:, ɔ: (Hindi)

Diphthongs – Nil.

(ii) *Consonants* — (Total 23)

Plosives — — Aspirates of the ten plosives and q (Hindi)

Nasals — — ṉ (Tamil)

Others — — ṛ, ṛh, ś, f, *z*, *x*, ɣ (Hindi)

ḷ, ɹ, ṯ, ḏ (Tamil)

10. Conclusion : Thus to do justice to and keep alive the true phonological features of both Hindi and Tamil, we should necessarily have orthographic symbols to represent distinctively all the above units that are similar and dissimilar in both the languages. We get a total of *Sixty one* clearly distinguishable sound units and all of them should necessarily be represented in the common system of writing. If a lesser number of symbols is suggested, it would only show a lack of proper understanding of the two phonological systems and will ultimately in the long run ruin the genius of both the patterns, thereby blowing a death knell to the indigenous spirit of the languages. Consequently the two will die and new languages will come forth in their places. The best examples of this type of linguistic metamorphosis seem to be Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

In order to arrive at a common system of writing for all the Modern Indian Languages, it is imperative that the above methodology should be adopted. A few more symbols may have to be added to the above *sixty-one*. It may however be stated that if grapheme/s could be agreed to upon for signifying the elements of voicing and/or aspiration to be suitably added to the basic voiceless and nonaspirated units, the total number of orthographic units will be considerably reduced.

While offering a suggestion for a common system of writing for more than one language, it must be well remembered that it is the exacititude of the orthographic symbols representing the sound units of the languages that give life to the languages and make them live in their genuine form for ages. If the writing system of any language strikes at a level different from the correct phonological structure of the language, the language will lose its charm in the near or distant future. The life of any language rests to a very great extent on its writing system.

S. SHANKAR RAJU